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A Battle for Survival
By
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This writing is dedicated to my wife,
Florence and my son, Rudi, for their
encouragement and support

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The Events Before and After Kristallnacht

In the Fall of 1938, I was attending my fourth school. Under normal conditions, considering my age, I should have been in my second school. In the mid-thirties, the educational system in Berlin was quite different from the way it is currently in the United States. A child's education had to start, by law at the age of six, and could be completed at the age of fourteen. There was no Kindergarten in public schools, and the first class was called the Eighth Grade. After seven years of school a student would finally reach the First Grade, which would be their final year of schooling.

There was another educational structure available. This structure was geared to a higher level of learning and was preparatory to achieving a university degree. After four years of public school, at the age of ten, a student would switch to a school referred to as a Gymnasium, comparable with a High School in the United States. Even though this was part of the city's public educational system, tuition was charged. Two different philosophies to higher education were available. One was called the Humanistic School and began with the study of Latin, continuing the following year with Greek. This ultimately led to a Bachelor of Science degree. The other school had a much more modern approach to education, and the first foreign language taught was French, followed by English. The studies in each of the schools were based on a nine-year curriculum. In the mid-thirties, after Hitler came to power, the time factor was reduced by one year. The rumor was that this decision was made because Hitler wanted more young men available at an earlier age, as the graduates were automatically candidates for officers in his army. It was well known that Hitler intended to build up his army in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles.

I enrolled in the more modern of these two types of schools. The Berlin Board of Education ran the school. Several scholastic requirements had to be met in order to be admitted, but in 1934 there were not yet any religious restrictions. The school year normally began shortly after Easter, and ended just prior to Easter the following year. Toward the end of my second year in this school things got pretty unbearable for me. My class had approximately thirty students, all boys; Girls went to separate schools. There were about three or four other Jewish students in my class. I was exposed to more anti-Semitic remarks than most of my Jewish classmates. In retrospect, I believe that more insults were directed toward me because I was less willing to accept these remarks. At the end of the school year I was supposed to transfer from this school to an old established Jewish Middle School, called Grosse Hamburger, named for the street on which it was located. This was only meant to be a temporary solution for me, as a Jewish High School was scheduled to open within a short time. The Middle School, which should have been educationally one step below the one I had previously attended, was in reality more competitive as no time was spent in the study of Nazi philosophy. The students were more motivated to a higher level of educational achievement.

The day before the last school day of this term, our class had an outing planned to the Berlin Aquarium. To get there, we took the U-Bahn (subway). While we were on the train, one of my classmates made an anti-Semitic remark to me, and I gave him a good beating. As a result, not only were the Gentile students against me, but also my Jewish classmates' attitudes were negative towards me, as they were afraid that they would have to suffer on account of my actions.

After touring the Aquarium, our teacher planned to dismiss us and let us return home on our own. I heard that the whole class was planning to unite to give me a beating after the teacher's dismissal, and in the meantime, they

were watching all the Aquarium's exits to prevent my premature escape. I did not intend to be a hero and fight the whole class. I sought to escape from the Aquarium, and succeeded at slipping out at a moment when one of the exits was left unguarded.

Shortly after I arrived home, I got a call from one of my Jewish classmates. He informed me that the whole class was in a tremendous rage when they realized that I had escaped from the Aquarium. He advised me to stay home the next day, which was my last day in this school, and he would get my report card. I appreciated and accepted his suggestion.

A few weeks later I encountered the boy I had beaten up in the subway, on the street. He was by himself and chose to ignore me. I did not see any reason to acknowledge him either and we went our own ways.

After spending one year in the Middle School, I was transferred to the newly created Jewish Gymnasium in April 1937. On my way to this school, I had to change trolley cars on Potsdamer Platz. Today, this is one of the anchors of the Berlin Wall. In the late thirties, a very well known restaurant, which featured nighttime entertainment, called Haus Vaterland, a division of the Kempinsky Hotels, which are still highly regarded today, was located at this place. For the first time I saw there a sign at the door that later on started to appear on many establishments, "Dogs and Jews are undesirable here." Naturally, the dogs were always mentioned before the Jews. I lived then in what is now considered East Berlin, and attended school in what is now West Berlin. This, of course, would be impossible now, with the Berlin Wall preventing passage out of East Germany.

On the morning of November 10, 1938, when I was almost fifteen years old, I left my house as customary, for my trip to school. Getting to school

involved a trolley car ride of approximately twenty-five minutes. The trip started at Leipziger and Friedrichstrasse, about three blocks from my house, located in the garment district of pre-war Berlin. The best-known children's wear store in Berlin, Arnold Mueller, was located on the corner of my trolley stop. Like many other clothing stores in Berlin before the war, this store was Jewish owned. On this morning I noticed that all the display windows were smashed into many pieces. On my trolley ride to school, I saw many other demolished store windows on the Leipzigerstrasse, one of the main shopping streets in Berlin.

In school, I heard from my classmates, who lived in different areas, that they had witnessed similar destruction of property. That is how I learned that the majority of Jewish owned stores in Berlin had had their windows shattered, merchandise looted, and had been otherwise destroyed during the prior night. This night came to be known as Kristallnacht (The night of broken glass), and was meant as a retaliation by the government for the shooting of a secretary of the German Embassy in Paris, by a young Jewish student named Hershel Grynszpan, on November 7, 1938. Grynszpan was upset because Germany had recently deported his parents to Poland, where they had been born. The rest of the school day passed without further incident.

In the early afternoon I returned home to my apartment, which was partly used for my father's business as an exclusive custom tailor. After I was home a short while I heard the doorbell ring. I did not open the door, as an apprentice in my father's business was trained to do it. Within a few minutes, this young man, also Jewish, told me that he had opened the door for two Gestapo agents. I hardly had time to comprehend or digest this news, when I saw my father take his overcoat, say goodbye, and leave with the two men.

During the latter part of 1938, all Jews who had assets of over 10,000 Reichmarks, had to file a special registration form indicating their total financial means. Later, it became common knowledge that the arrests after Kristallnacht were based on the list of Jewish men who had to declare their assets. Within a few days I found out that my father was taken to a concentration camp, Sachsenhausen, near Oranienburg, a suburb of Berlin.

The next step for me was to get my father released. As my mother was in poor health, I considered that this was my responsibility. I went to the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin to inquire what step I would have to take to obtain my father's release. I soon found out that my father's service in World War I in the army of the German-Austrian Alliance, along with his present intention to leave Germany, could be helpful factor in gaining his release.

We had registered quite some time earlier with the United States Consulate in Berlin for a quota assignment to emigrate to the United States. As the quota was not relaxed in any way for Jewish emigrants who wanted to escape Nazism, the waiting period was so long that it was virtually hopeless. I therefore sent a telegram to friends in Melbourne, Australia, explaining the situation to them, and asked their help to get visas to Australia. Within a few days I received a return cable, "Visas on the way." As I found out later, it was very hard to get visas for Australia, but our friends having left Berlin themselves not too long past, were well acquainted with the situation in Germany, and figured that this cable might be helpful. I promptly submitted this cable along with proof that my father had served in the German army during World War I to the Gestapo. I was only 15 years of age and had never heard at the time of anyone my age having been detained by the Gestapo, so I was not afraid to submit my request for my father's release in person at the Gestapo Headquarters in Berlin.

Nothing further happened until November 28, 1938, when the doorbell rang unexpectedly. A man rushed into the apartment, and it took me a while to realize that this was my father. After eighteen days my father who had been an impeccable dresser and extremely vain about his appearance was virtually unrecognizable. His hair had been entirely shaved off and he had undergone a thorough delousing process, which ruined his clothing beyond repair. The emotional damage to my father after his stay in a concentration camp was beyond my comprehension. As a condition for his release, my father had to sign a statement that he would not talk about his experience in the concentration camp. Obviously, they knew how to emphasize this with great effect, as I never heard my father say a word about it.

As I had expected, we never received visas for Australia. But the telegram we had received was helpful as a temporary solution.

Leaving Berlin - Spring 1939

Shortly after Kristallnacht, Hitler issued a law dictating that Jews in Germany could not own any business after December 31, 1938. This law was one of many Hitler passed which limited the freedom of Jewish people. Shortly after his release from the concentration camp, my father was forced to liquidate his business and was given a few weeks to do so. The biggest assets of my father's business were the good reputation he had established as a custom tailor over a period of twenty years, and his inventory, which consisted of fine fabrics for making men's suits. Most of the fabric was imported from England and was scarce at that time. One of my father's non-Jewish employees wanted to take over the business. This employee planned to get an appraiser who would arrange that the Jewish owner would only receive a minute portion of the actual value of the business. Officially, my father had no choice, but he succeeded at finding a way to get around this law. He promised to give the man a list of all of his customers and set up a letter stating that this man had been in his employ for a long time. He further stated that the new owner would carry on the business in the same fashion that he had for the past twenty years. For this list there was no charge, and my father was able to take the piece goods and sell them at a fair market price.

The law preventing Jews from owning businesses was actually an extension of laws, which had been previously issued by the Hitler regime. For a long period of time Jews had not been allowed to work for the government; those who had worked for the government were discharged. Jewish physicians were only allowed to treat Jewish patients, and all of their hospital privileges were withheld. Jewish teachers could only teach Jewish children and could only teach them in Jewish schools. Artists, entertainers and writers were not allowed to function in their professions. Even though Jews were still permitted

to attend places of entertainment, signs were posted all over stating that their presence was undesirable. In Berlin, an organization called Juedischer Kulturbund (Jewish Cultural Organization) was established to present theater performances, as well as lectures. This was done to achieve two purposes: to give Jews cultural activities where their presence would be desired, and to give an outlet for all Jews involved in the field of entertainment. A junior division was created to provide high school students with the opportunity to participate in cultural events well suited to their age — events which I was happy to attend.

One of the other laws required Jews with assets over ten thousand Reichmarks to pay a special tax of 25% of all of their assets. In addition, Jews had to deliver all their jewelry, gold, and silver to the authorities, and were given a minimal compensation, just enough to give the appearance of a legal transaction.

My parents asked me to make this delivery, which contained a token amount of jewelry. One of the items was my gold pocket watch. This watch had been given to me two years prior by my grandfather, upon my Bar Mitzvah. My grandfather had worn the watch for many years and I had always admired it. I had considered myself the proud owner of a valuable heirloom. It was a tremendous disappointment to me to have to surrender this pocket watch. This was an item I cherished deeply and had not even worn once. No occasion had occurred that I had seen as important enough to wear this watch.

I was given an itemized receipt of my delivery, and in checking it, I noticed that my watch was not listed. I strongly protested to the official in charge of the collections and was told in very clear terms that Germans make no mistakes, and it would be healthier for me to not say anything further about it. A couple of days later I helped my father take a suitcase to the

railroad station, to be shipped to Belgium. This suitcase contained personal effects including most of our remaining jewelry, which was sewn into different items of clothing to hide them. It was prearranged that we would see a certain customs officer, whose bribe had been agreed upon in advance. Without further complication the suitcase was shipped to friends in Antwerp. Its arrival was confirmed shortly thereafter.

By the time the winter of 1938-1939 was reached, leaving Germany had become imperative. Unfortunately, no nation in the Western world was willing to accept Jews from Germany. In 1938, a new business developed — the selling of landing permits to Cuba. Many Jews desired to emigrate to the United States, but having an affidavit was not sufficient. The privilege of immigrating was based on a strict quota system. This quota severely limited the number of Jews who could emigrate and it was known to likely create a wait of several years. The chances of surviving such an extensive stay in Germany, after the events of Kristallnacht, appeared extremely poor. The short distances between Cuba and the United States led people to believe that going to Cuba would be a good temporary solution.

The issuance of landing permits to Cuba was a transaction involving corrupt Cuban government officials. They were purchased through unscrupulous lawyers in Germany. For the price of \$525, my father purchased the permits for our family of four. This had to be paid in U.S. dollars. At this time in Germany no one was allowed to have nor could one legally purchase U.S. dollars. Fortunately, my father had been sufficiently foresighted to have money in the United States. The fee was paid using the customary pretence that the money was a gift from relatives outside of Germany.

The availability of transatlantic travel from Germany to Cuba was very limited. Due to the sudden immigration, all ships were heavily over-booked.

Each month, one ship carried approximately 500 passengers from Hamburg to Mexico, making a stop in Havana, Cuba. We finally succeeded in booking passage on the Orinoco, of the Hapag Line, for an early May, 1939 departure. Our most essential household belongings and furniture were packed in a crate to follow us on a freighter.

Shortly before our scheduled departure, the Hapag Line announced the sailing of a larger ship, the St. Louis, which could carry approximately nine hundred passengers. This ship was scheduled to leave two weeks earlier than our planned departure date. We had the option of changing our booking, but my parents decided that it was not worthwhile to rush for a difference of only two weeks.

We departed from Berlin, with a couple of days stay in Hamburg as we had planned. On board ship our accommodations were miserable. They were dormitory style, with men and women placed into separate sleeping quarters. The ship's only stop before Havana was Antwerp. Our arrival in Antwerp was delayed for a few hours because of a shipboard fire. The fire was caused by an electrical short circuit next to a staircase. This was quite an exciting happening for me as a fifteen-year-old boy. When I got up the first morning on board ship I felt fine, until I saw my seasick fellow passengers. In no time I joined their ranks. Up to this day, I still feel that seasickness is one of the most contagious diseases.

Among the passengers on the ship, my father met a man who had been a fellow inmate in the concentration camp, Sachsenhausen. He and his wife were on their way to Mexico. The second morning after our departure, we arrived in Antwerp. A rumor spread on the ship that the passengers on the St. Louis, which was now in Cuban waters, were having trouble landing in

Havana. Nobody paid too much attention to the news, and we were all looking forward to spending two days in Antwerp.

We were allowed to leave Germany with ten Reichmarks per person, which gave us a total of forty Reichmarks in our possession. As I had studied French for five years, it was up to me to find a bank where we could convert some of our Reichmarks into Belgian Francs. I soon realized it was easier said than done, as my knowledge of French banking terms was rather limited. It was quite a difficult task for me to complete this rather simple transaction. We did some sightseeing, visited several friends, and took back on board the suitcase containing our personal effects and jewelry which we had shipped several months earlier from Berlin.

In the evening, shortly after our departure an announcement was made that the captain wanted to see all of the passengers who were headed for Cuba. We were told that the Cuban government had voided all landing permits, and the ship was heading back to Hamburg, Germany. Upon arrival in Hamburg, all passengers with Cuban landing permits would have to disembark, before the ship continues its voyage to Cuba and Mexico. Later on, we heard that there had been a change in the Cuban Ministry of Immigration, and the new official would not recognize the lucrative dealings of his predecessor. The official story was that the extra ship, the St. Louis, had created an imbalance in immigration. Therefore all landing permits were revoked.

Shortly after the captain's announcement, the passengers formed committees. These committees sent cables to all Jewish organizations in the Western world, and all heads of government, requesting entrance for all of us, as a group. We only had a few hours left aboard ship — too short for us to expect a reply. It was decided that we would all stay together in Hamburg.

We felt that as a group of several hundred people, we would have a better chance than we would if we were to act as individuals.

We also had some problems of our own. Our crate with household belongings was scheduled to leave on a freighter. This was easily cancelled by cable. The big problem was the illegal possession of jewelry, which might be discovered by Customs upon re-entry in Germany. My father spoke with the man he had met in Sachsenhausen. As his destination was Mexico, he was not affected by the change of events in Cuba, other than enduring a delay of a couple of days. The man was agreeable to taking the jewelry with him to Mexico, and my father hoped to recover it at some time in the future. After the war, I was able to contact this man. We agreed that minor items could be sold to cover the vault costs of many years. It took several more years for my brother, who is in the travel business, to find a contact that could bring everything to New York. The most unfortunate part of the story is that most of the jewelry was lost many years later due to a burglary.

It became quickly evident that we were not the only ones who had brought goods on board in Antwerp that were illegally shipped from Germany. Fearing that there would be repercussions upon re-entering Germany, many passengers threw their suitcases overboard, into the North Sea. There were quite a few emotional scenes on board the ship, including a few suicide attempts.

Upon our arrival in Hamburg, the Gestapo met us. We were told explicitly that we would have to leave Hamburg within twenty-four hours, for our former place of residence. Otherwise, the Gestapo would interfere with our unauthorized stay in Hamburg. All of our hopes of finding a permanent solution were thwarted by this unexpected event.

The next day we returned to Berlin. Having no housing or money, the Jewish Community found us lodgings in an Old Age Home. I remember there was a bulletin board in this place, which was headed by daily death announcements. It gave me, as a teenager, a very peculiar feeling. After a few days, we found temporary accommodations with some friends in Berlin.

Now we were on our own to escape from Germany without income, only temporary housing, and virtually no hope at all for our scattered group to find a joint solution. In the meantime, we heard that the passengers of the St. Louis had been luckier than us. They were not given permission to disembark in Havana, but they did not have to return to Nazi Germany. While this ship was anchored outside of the Havana harbor, within sight of the Florida Keys, her passengers were finally divided into four groups. France, England, Belgium and Holland each accepted one group. Only the United States, in May 1939, refused to accept any Jews beyond the official quota. Unfortunately, many of the St. Louis survivors who remained on the continent eventually perished in concentration camps.

At this time, the early summer of 1939, there was only one place willing to accept Jews from Germany. It was Shanghai; considered one of the least desirable cities because of poor economic conditions, poor climate, and because the German Axis partner had occupied Japan, since 1937. Only one section of Shanghai was regarded as an international zone, and all Jewish emigrants were headed for this area. The need at this time for Jews to leave Germany was so great that even for this destination of last resort, steamship tickets were sold out for many months in advance. My father succeeded in accelerating our departure on the Potsdam, of the Lloyd Steamship Company, for August 20th, from Bremerhaven. In those days, the Germans were interested in getting hard, international currency. Because we were able to pay part of our passage in U.S. Dollars, our bookings received priority.

We left Berlin and embarked on the Potsdam on August 20th. The Potsdam was a new luxury ship. As we had first class accommodations, the only ones available at the time, it was a marked contrast to the Orinoco. We had a private cabin to ourselves. The food served in the dining room was the most luxurious I had ever seen, and the service was exceptional. At this time, only one month before World War II began, there was already a shortage of food in Germany. As the first class passengers were mostly diplomats and foreign businessmen, there was no shortage of food on board the ship. The crate with furnishings was rerouted to Shanghai. Our first stop was Rotterdam, and some friends came to see us on board ship. We were not able to go into town as the ship only stayed for a few hours. Our next stop was Southampton, where we never even docked. A tender approached us for the exchange of passengers and freight. We continued our journey, and on August 25th, we reached the Bay of Biscay, which cuts in to the west of France and the north of Spain. On this day, a notice appeared on the ship's bulletin board. The news said, "In consequence of the aggravated political situation in Europe, we are forced to head for a safe, and neutral port." The captain no longer received his orders from the steamship company, but was under the direct orders of the German government. I had a little compass, which indicated to us that we had drastically changed course, and we were now headed due North.

On the ship, our German flag was removed and a Norwegian flag was hoisted. The ship's name was changed from the Potsdam to a Norwegian sounding name. The colors of the smokestacks were changed from German to those of Norway. All our portholes were covered, and at night our ship was totally blacked out from the outside. We sailed north for quite some distance and saw many whales and patches of snow and ice. As we approached Iceland, we turned east, toward Norway. Not far from the Norwegian coast, we turned south again. In case of war, the Germans wanted the ship to be in a German

harbor. On August 30th, we were back in Bremerhaven, safe by German standards. For us, it was a miserable step backwards. Naturally, as soon as we learned of the change of destination, we had to cable instructions to halt the departure of the crate with our furnishings. We must have stayed for a night or two in Bremen. We arrived back in Berlin on September 1st, in time to see the special newspaper editions, which announced that Germany had liberated Danzig and marched into Poland. Three days later, England and France declared war on Germany; the first sign that we were at the beginning of World War II. With the help of friends, we were able to get a furnished room in the area that is now East Berlin. Within a few days, we had the first English air raid in Berlin, and we spent a few hours in the air raid shelter of our building.

At this time my father and I were in more danger in Berlin than my mother and younger brother. Jewish males above a certain age were the first ones to be arrested by the Nazis. Therefore, after a few days, my father and I left for Cologne. Our intention was to get close to the Belgian border in order to find a way to gain illegal entry into Belgium. We had some leads where we could stay in Cologne, without having to register with the police, as was customary with any hotel stay. We had been there for almost two weeks before we could make contact with smugglers who could help us across the border into Belgium. Arrangements were finalized, and we were taken late one afternoon by truck toward the border. We were in a group of about twenty people, of all ages. Near the border, we left the truck and walked with the guide for about an hour. The guide then explained that this was as far as he would take us. He said that the border was straight ahead, and that if we walked about one hundred meters we would be in Belgium, and meet our Belgian contact. Our group walked and walked, but we never met the contact. It was hard to tell if we missed our contact, or if the whole arrangement was a fraud. One man in the group, who was there with his wife and child, emerged as the

leader. I consulted my compass, and informed him that the direction in which he was leading us was headed straight back to Germany. No attention was paid to my repeated complaints, and everyone followed him like a flock of sheep. Within a short time the German border police arrested us all. We were taken to Roetgen, a small village near the border, in Germany. After being interrogated, all of the women and children were released. I too was released. I had prearranged with my father to meet him as soon as possible at the place where we had stayed in Cologne.

A few days later my father was released and we made another attempt to cross the border. This time we were successful and reached Antwerp safely. For several days we stayed with our friends. Nevertheless, we had to get some authorization to legalize our stay in Antwerp. Antwerp is composed of small communities; each one having its own small city hall. We were advised to see a certain civil servant in one of those city halls. For a personal compensation, he would see that we got an authorization to remain in Antwerp for six months. We were assured that there wouldn't be any trouble to get this authorization renewed when it expired.

Our friends' apartment was in a very beautiful, modern eight-story building, which was tall for the Belgian standard of that time. They had it constructed several months earlier as an investment. Unfortunately, there was a limit to how much we could take advantage of their hospitality, and we soon moved to a furnished room in a much less desirable neighborhood. We started to familiarize ourselves with Antwerp, and without too much trouble found a nice, small modern apartment in a convenient area. Our crate with household belongings was now shipped from Hamburg to Antwerp.

In Belgium, apartments were laid out in a rather peculiar way. There was a small room in the apartment, intended as the bathroom. The room was

empty, as the tenant was supposed to furnish it with his own sink and bathtub. A toilet and sink were in another small room in the apartment. My father chose to use this small room as his tailor shop. I was decided that I we wanted to take a bath, we would have to use a public bathhouse.

Once the apartment was furnished, my father started to work for private customers, as a custom tailor. I became his apprentice. Some of his customers were former customers from Berlin who had moved to Antwerp. In advance, my father had stopped in a textile store specializing in suiting materials to familiarize himself with the availability and cost of these fabrics in Antwerp. The owner of this store turned out to be a Jew who was originally from Germany. He admired my father's suit, and inquired where it had been made. My father told him he had made it himself. The shop owner asked my father how much he charged to make a suit, and advised my father to raise the price considerable. They made a deal whereby after he sent a certain number of customers to my father, the store owner would be entitled to have a suit made, for himself, free of charge.

At this time, my father began to make arrangements for my mother and brother to leave Berlin and join us in Antwerp. In January 1940, they arrived in Antwerp, having taken a similar route as we, without any interlude of arrest.

My father had more work than he could handle. I started to learn the trade, and my brother, who was eleven and a half years old, started to go to school. We were faced with a new language, Flemish. I considered it more or less like a dialect of German. I understood quite a bit without much effort, and did not have too much trouble reading it. Speaking the language was much more challenging. We lived very close to the Jewish section of town. In addition to Flemish, I started to learn Yiddish, as it was an additional means of communication. Our lives started to follow a more organized, and stable routine than they had for a long time.

All progressed nicely for several months, until May 10, 1940. On this day, Germany invaded Holland and Belgium, by-passing the Maginot Line, to get into France. On the next day, May 11th, my father and I were arrested. All of a sudden/- the tide had turned again. Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany were arrested as suspicious enemy aliens. After all of our efforts to escape from Germany, our present peaceful life came to an abrupt end. We were once again exposed to Nazi persecution.

The First Time I Saw Paris

In the winter of 1940-41 I was living in Antwerp. My home was in a small modern, apartment house. It had central heating, but because of wartime events, the heating was not operating. To get some heat, I purchased a coal-burning kitchen stove, so that I would be able to heat at least one room. I was sixteen years old and in charge of the household, which included both my twelve-year-old brother and myself.

On the day the Germans invaded Belgium (in May, 1940), my father and I were arrested as enemy aliens, and incarcerated in an old army fort. I always had the habit to read small print and was a stickler for details. I was therefore aware of the minimum age for being interned. I proved to the Belgian army officer in charge that I was under the minimum age, and my release was authorized after two days. My release created a conflict within me. I didn't know whether to stay with my father, or to accept my release. My father assured me that it would be better for me to accept my freedom so that I could be with my mother and my younger brother, than it would be for me to stay with him. My father was sent to the Southwest of France to be interned in St. Cyprien, and later on was transferred to Gurs.

When I returned home, to my dismay I found my mother bedridden. Due to all the excitement, she had suffered a stroke, one from which she never recovered. A few weeks later, my brother and I were left on our own.

Within a couple of months, we were approaching a new crisis. People who like us, were recent arrivals from Germany and Austria, were being sent to the province of Limbourg. A rumor spread that they would be put to work' in the coalmines. This definitely was more than I had bargained for. I decided

it was time to leave Belgium and applied for a stateless passport. This was granted to me without complication, but the validity of the paper was tied to my authorized stay at Belgium, which was for four months. As soon as I had the passport, I contacted some friends who were close to the Consul of EI Salvador. Through their office I promptly received a visa for EI Salvador. This visa was for a short duration, limited to the validity of the passport. I never intended to go to EI Salvador. I used this as a pretense to get to the South of France to be nearer to my father.

The German military headquarters in Brussels was my next goal, and I applied there for a pass to go to Paris. In the meantime, back in Antwerp, the police visited my apartment daily to hand me the papers ordering me to Limbourg. I did not answer the doorbell when they rang and kept very quiet until they left. One wintry day, as I was approaching my building, the owner of a candy store that was on the ground floor of my building (an Orthodox Jew) pointed 'me out to the Belgian policeman who was looking for me. There was no way out for me; I had to accept, and sign for the papers. By now it was not a tragic situation, as I was already in possession of the pass to Paris.

A rumor spread in Antwerp that people who were in possession of passes such as I had, were not allowed to cross the border into France, and were sent back to Belgium. Through some contacts, I made the acquaintance of a German lieutenant who frequently drove from Brussels to Paris. For twice the price of the railroad fare, he agreed to drive my brother and me to Paris. It seemed to me a small premium to pay for the protection from a Wehrmacht officer, and I was glad to accept the ride.

In those days, there were two borders between Belgium and France. First we arrived at the old Belgian-French border. The border control took one look at our car; a private car with Berlin license plates, and to my disgust opened the barrier without any questions asked. A little further on, we arrived at the artificial border created and manned by the German army. There, our German officer told us to sit in the car, took our papers, and returned in a few minutes with permission to cross the border. He drove us to the center of Paris, and found us a hotel room across from the Folies Bergeres.

In our room we were surprised to see two toilets, one shaped slightly different than the other one. This was the first time I ever saw, and heard of something called a bidet.

Our papers from Brussels had to get a stamp of approval from the German military headquarters in Paris, before we would be allowed to cross into so-called Free France. The next morning we met our German officer in front of the German Army headquarters to get this matter accomplished. Unfortunately, he had no influence there, and the place was mobbed with people standing on line, all for the same purpose. I saw many familiar faces from Antwerp, and was told that many people were waiting for weeks to get clearance to travel to the South of France, without any success. My finances were sufficient for staying several days in Paris, but I could not afford to stay for several weeks. I got myself a job waiting on tables during lunch time in a lunchroom located in the Jewish quarter of Paris, subsidized by the Jewish community. There was no pay, but lunch for my brother and myself was free. As this was the main meal of the day, it was helpful to us.

2 Fr. voor kosten van het formulier.
2 Fr. pour le coût de la formule.

KONINKRIJK BELGIE ROYAUME DE BELGIQUE
Ministerie van Buitenlandsche Zaken Ministère des Affaires Étrangères

IDENTITEITSGETUIGSCHRIFT
Certificat d'Identité
TEN BEHOEVE VAN VADERLANDLOOZEN
A L'USAGE DES APATRIDES

Volgnummer 1287
N° d'ordre

Naam en voornamen van den houder
Nom et prénoms du porteur HALBREICH Erwin Israël

en zijn broeder - et son frère EGON, geboren - né, Berlijn 6-7-1914
plaats en datum van geboorte
Lieu et date de naissance Berlijn
5-2-1914

Van Duitschen oorsprong; bezit echter deze nationaliteit niet meer.
D'origine allemande, mais ne possédant plus cette nationalité.

Familienaam en voornamen van den vader
Nom et prénoms du père Halbreich Rudolf

Familienaam en voornamen van de moeder
Nom et prénoms de la mère Engelmann Gita

Beroep
Profession zonder

PERSOONSBSCHRIJVING
SIGNALEMENT

Haar Cheveux	<u>bruin</u>
Oogen Yeux	<u>bruin</u>
Neus Nez	<u>gevoel</u>
Gefaat Visage	<u>oval</u>
Bijzondere kenteekens Signes particuliers	
Gestalte Taille	<u>1m 76cm</u>

De ondergeteekende verklaart dat bovenstaande
photographie en handteekening stellig deze zijn van
den houder van dit document.
Voor den geldigheidsduur van dit getuigschrift
zie het laatste Belgische visa hieronder aangebracht:
In ieder geval houdt dit getuigschrift op geldig
te zijn twee jaar na den datum zijner aflevering.

Le soussigné certifie que la photo et la signature
ci-dessus sont bien celles du porteur du présent
document.
Pour la durée de validité du présent certificat,
voir le dernier visa belge apposé ci-après :
En tout état de cause, le présent certificat cesse
d'être valable deux ans après la date de sa deli-
vrance.

Afgeleverd te Antwerpen, den 18 JAN. 1941
Delivré à Anvers, le

Miners den Minister van Buitenlandsche Zaken :
Au nom du Ministre des Affaires Étrangères :
De Afgevaardigde Ambtenaar,
Le Fonctionnaire délégué

R. JOD. FETTER

Dit getuigschrift is slechts geldig om zich te begeven naar
de landen aangeduid in elk der verderstaande Belgische
visa's.
Het wordt alleenlijk afgeleverd om aan de vaderland-
loozen een identiteit getuigschrift te bezorgen dat als
aanwinst kan dienen en omvat geen bescherming vanwege de
Belgische Regering ten gunste van den houder. Het is
verboden dit getuigschrift van een verlengstuk te voort en
op gevaar af van het zijn geldigheid te doen verliezen.
Na het verstrijken van zijn geldigheidsduur dient dit getig-
schrift aan het Ministerie van Buitenlandsche Zaken te Bus-
sel te worden teruggezonden.

Ce certificat n'est valable que pour se rendre dans les
pays indiqués dans chacun des visages figurant ci-après.
Il est délivré uniquement pour fournir aux apatrides un
certificat d'identité pouvant tenir lieu de passeport et n'im-
plique en faveur du porteur aucune protection du Gouver-
nement Belge. Il est interdit de rallumer ce certificat sous
peine de sa faire perdre sa validité. Après expiration de
sa validité, ce certificat doit être remis au Ministère des
Affaires Étrangères à Bruxelles.

Above is an Identity Paper, issued by the Belgian Foreign Department, as a substitute passport for stateless people. My brother, who was only twelve years of age, was

included on this document. Under Nazi law, all Jewish males were given the middle name of Israel, and this was applied by the Belgian authorities on this paper.

I had been paying 70 Francs daily for our hotel, a price far too expensive for my means. I looked for a more affordable hotel, and found a place where the rate was 70 Francs a week. Unfortunately, the difference was not in the price alone; we didn't even have one toilet in the room!

I found a second job, strictly piece work, where I could work as much as I wanted. This consisted of hand painting buttons for ladies' coats and dresses. In the meantime, I made friends with a number of people. We were all about the same age, coming from Belgium, all of German or Austrian birth, and headed to the South of France. We took in the sights of Paris, as money was tight, we saw things that did not require an admission fee. One day we passed in front of the Eiffel Tower. There was a big sign at the entrance limiting admittance to Germans only. For me, at seventeen years old, and the first time in Paris, going up the Eiffel Tower was very important to me. I told my friends I would seek a way to gain admission. A Parisian policeman who I ignored and tried to pass guarded the entrance, but he wasn't willing to ignore me. He called me, and started to run after me, until I finally stopped. I spoke to him in German, and naturally he did not understand a word I said. I pretended I did not understand any French until he asked me, "Are you German?" My reply was affirmative, and he asked for some documentary proof. Naturally, I did not have the required paper and had to quickly work on a way to bluff him. I started to take out my pass from the German military headquarters in Brussels, all written in German, with a big swastika on the outside. As soon as he saw the swastika he gave me carte blanche to enter the Eiffel Tower. Before entering, I called my brother and friend to join me. Only my brother was brave enough to follow me. In the tower, everyone but us was wearing a German uniform. I was too nervous to use the elevator, so the two of us climbed the stairs. The view was overwhelming, but in retrospect, I believe we were too

exhausted at the time to fully appreciate this exceptional sight.

By now we had been in Paris for over five weeks without making any progress to get clearance papers to go to the South of France. I heard through some friends that I could get free accommodations at a rabbinical school on the Left Bank. The only requirement was that I had to apply with the Police for a permit to stay in Paris. I had a feeling that in making this request I would be looking for trouble. My friends assured me there is no problem in applying for the permit, and that you are given a date in approximately two weeks to pick up the authorization. I followed their advice. After I was in my new quarters about a week, my friends went to pick up their residence permits. They were promptly arrested, allowed to pick up their belongings under police escort, and sent back to Belgium. Now I knew my days in Paris were numbered. I had to leave within one week or share my friends' ill fate.

There was no chance to get the desired papers, so I had to look for a way to cross the demarcation line illegally to get to the South of France. After several days of hard work, I had the contacts with guides to cross the demarcation line, and we met our deadline to leave Paris.

Leaving Paris for "Free" Vichy France

In the middle of May 1941, my brother and I left Paris for Bourges. I had made arrangements with a guide to take us over the demarcation line, which was the border between occupied France and Vichy France. Naturally, the guide had to be compensated for his services, and the amount had been prearranged. We agreed that he would take us to a railroad station in Free France, not too far from Bourges.

Shortly before reaching our destination, the guide insisted on more money. As the financial arrangements had been made earlier, I thought the guide was trying to take advantage of us. I refused to submit to this request. I was young and daring, confident that I would be able to find the next railroad station without the guide's assistance. Within a short time I succeeded at finding the station.

My father was interned in the camp, de Gurs, which was near the Pyrenees, not far from the Spanish border. We headed in this general direction without having clearly defined plans. We next took the train to Perigueux, in the province of Dordogne. We had decided to head toward Perigueux for two reasons: First because it was closer to Gurs, and second, because we had friends from Antwerp who were now living in Perigueux. For a couple of days we stayed with our friends. They helped us to get in touch with the local Jewish community. With their advice and aid, we found our next residence in a Jewish Boy Scout camp in Moissac, located in the province of Tarn and Garonne. Our finances were running low, and we really had no other options left.

This scout camp had many operational problems. Due to general war shortages of food, and seemingly insufficient funding, the atmosphere was, to put it mildly, strained. As our stay there was illegal, we were not allowed to

Astreiné à résider
à **Marseille**
RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

0077

RÉCÉPISSÉ
DE DEMANDE DE CARTE D'IDENTITÉ
ou de renouvellement de la carte N° _____

REPLIÉ

Délivré à M. (U) **Fabrisch Erwin**
né le **3-2-1924** **Berlin**
de nationalité **Allemande**
résidant à **MARSEILLE**
rue **L'Intérieur** **Pauquier** n° **36**
Profession: _____

Le présent récépissé, tenant lieu de permis de séjour, sera valable
jusqu'au **16 Octobre 1941** (un mois au maximum),
Taxe **différée 3 mois** le **16/7/1941**
N° du reçu: _____
Date de la poste: _____
Pénalité versée: _____

Président du Commissaire de Police
Timbre de la Mairie
en l'honneur
du Commissariat

Número del recibo: **emigration**
Date de la poste: **El Salvador**

à saurait, en aucun cas, tenir lieu de pièce d'identité.

pliss

This paper, issued by the Police Commissioner, is a receipt, which shows that I applied for an Identity Card for my temporary stay in Marseille. It noted that I anticipated emigrating to El Salvador.

On the back of this paper are several extensions of validity, each for a period of three months.

helped us to get to Marseille, and put us up in the Grand Hotel du Levant, not far from the Vieux Port. The name of this hotel sounded very impressive to us. Alas, it was only the name. The rooms were dormitory style, with double-decker beds, and sanitary conditions beyond description. I only was surprised to find the beds in the same place every day, as I had always thought that the bedbugs might walk away with them. The bed frames were made of wrought iron, and every week we doused them with kerosene and ignited them, in an attempt to burn the bedbugs. Forty-five years have passed since then, and in all these years I have never seen a place in a condition as wretched as this.

Shortly after our arrival, we saw our father for the first time in over a year. It was an emotional reunion. My father had not been present at the time of my mother's death, so unfortunately I had to bring him up to date on the bad news. The camp, Les Milles, was located in a factory, which formerly had been used for manufacturing bricks. It consisted of one main building housing the internees, and several smaller buildings used as guard houses, offices, a kitchen and an infirmary. Over one thousand internees were divided into several groups. Each group was housed in a dormitory accommodating more than a hundred men, each sleeping on individual cots. In 1978, I paid a brief visit to Les Milles. There was a working factory again at the campsite, but nothing to commemorate the events of the war years.

The OSE sent my brother to one of their homes for children, Chateau de Masgelier, in the province Creuse, which was a few hundred miles north of Marseille. There he would be with children his own age, attend school, and otherwise lead a more structured life.

(1) M. **HALBREICH**
 Prénoms : **Erwin**
 Profession : **Sans**
 Né le **3. 2. 1924**
 (1) a **Berlin (Allemagne)**
 domicilié a **Marseille**
me Châteauneuf, 10.
 Pièce d'identité n° **65373**
 Nature : **Réceptionnel selon 24.10.42**
 Délivrée le **16. 7. 1944**
 par **Préf. du B. du Rhône**

NATIONALITÉ : **Allemande**
 est autorisé à circuler
Camp des Milles
(B. du Rhône)

Motif du déplacement :
vis. son Père interné
au chef-du Camp

Marseille le **1. 8. 44**
LE COMMISSAIRE PRINCIPAL
 (Cachet). **Signature de l'autorité**
Chef du Service des Etrangers

(1) A indiquer en majuscules d'im

This card is a Permit which authorizes me to visit my father at Camp Les Milles, about 15 miles from Marseille During the war years no foreigners were allowed to travel in Vichy France without an appropriate document.

My stay in Marseille had to be legalized. As a foreigner, I needed permission to reside there. With a social worker from the OSE, I went to the police and received a permit to stay for three days. This procedure was repeated three or four times and I got tired of my constant trips to the police. As I still had my passport from Belgium that contained an expired visa for El Salvador, I decided to make use of this during my next visit to the police. On the day my resident permit had to be extended, I went to the Prefecture de Police without the OSE assistance. I presented my passport with the expired visa for El Salvador. Counting on the incompetence of the civil service employee, I stated that my visa, written in Spanish, was valid, and that my aim was to go to El Salvador. For my departure, I would have to book passage on a ship -- at that time only available from Portugal. In addition to the passage, I needed transit visas for Spain and Portugal. I explained to the man that the request for my appearance every three days diminished my available time and thereby delayed me from reaching my primary objective, which was to emigrate from France. My ruse proved successful, and my stay was extended for a month without further difficulty. The next time I returned, it was automatically renewed for three months.

In those days, no foreigner was allowed to travel outside city limits without a *sauf-conduit* (a paper which lists your specific destination away from your place of residence). This paper was a prerequisite for seeing my father in Les Milles. After receiving the required documentation from the commandant of the camp stating that my father was interned there, the *sauf-conduit* was issued to me without any difficulty.

Even though my residence in Marseille was legal, as a foreigner I needed a special kind of working permit as a prerequisite for employment. I was informed that I didn't have a chance of receiving working papers, and that merely filing an application for such a permit could jeopardize my further stay in Marseille. I needed money and had no legal way to earn any. As long as I had to work illegally, I figured at least it should be lucrative, and I started to deal in food and cigarettes on the black market.

By now, I had moved to a slightly better hotel. At last, I had a room to myself. After a while, I noticed I had a silent business partner. My landlord was helping himself to some of the foods I had stored in my room. As he was a Frenchman, and I was a foreigner, I decided it would be better to keep my mouth shut, and write it off as a business expense.

About once a week I visited my father in Les Milles. At one time I was unable to extend my travel permit when required, and made the trip with an expired permit. To my misfortune, I walked into some Gendarmes when getting off the trolley, and was issued a summons to appear in court in Aix en Provence. As I was a minor, my father had to accompany me in court. My father had no trouble getting permission to leave the camp to be with me. He felt ill at ease in these circumstances and asked one of his fellow internees, a man who previously practiced law in Germany, to appear with us in court. This man actually gave more moral support than legal advice. The trial was very swift. I was fined one French franc. When I went to pay my fine to the court clerk I was informed that I would be billed by mail. To celebrate my very light fine, we had lunch in one of the best restaurants in Aix en Provence. A few weeks later I received my bill. The one franc turned out to be one gold franc, which was actually about one hundred francs. In addition, I had to pay court expenses. What I had thought to be a small fine turned out to be a sizeable amount.

Not only was there a shortage of food, but most items of clothing were also rationed. I needed a pair of shoes and filed a request for a coupon. After some time, instead of receiving a coupon for shoes, I was mailed a purchase coupon for a pair of slippers. I thought it might be easier to make an attempt to work with this coupon than to resubmit my application. Trying my luck in a small shoe store, it seemed that the saleslady was only willing to sell me slippers, and upon my insistence for a pair of shoes suggested that I wait a while for her husband, the owner. The man arrived after a short while and I repeated my request to him for shoes. I noticed that he examined me carefully, and finally asked me, "Are you Jewish?" I was not prepared for this question and hesitated with my reply. Deciding to stay with the truth, I answered, "Yes." I was questioned again. "What is this on

the door?" Now I understood -- I was being tested! On his doorframe he had a Mezuzah. As soon as I answered, he trusted me as a fellow Jew, and for a slightly inflated price, I purchased a pair of shoes with my slipper coupon. Similar incidents occurred frequently during the war in Europe. Throughout all the persecution, an opportunity to deal with a fellow Jew gave one a certain amount of trust and confidence.

I made some friends in Marseille. I had met some of them at the Grand Hotel du Levant, and another while visiting my father at Les Milles. He had secured his release from the camp due to his young age, and was now living in Marseille. Although he now lives in Belgium, we are still in touch with each other, almost fifty years later. We boys would get together, sometimes go to the movies, or walk around and then have a beer at a sidewalk cafe, but we definitely did not live what is today considered the typical teenage years.

The subtropical climate and poor hygienic conditions in Marseille created a fertile breeding ground for many types of illness. At one time I contracted Jaundice, and not too long afterwards, Typhoid Fever. As this sickness required frequent use of the bathroom it was especially more complicated, as the toilet was located one and a half flights below my room. This "toilet" consisted of two footrests acting like a platform on either side of a hole in the floor. This was then customary in inexpensive hotels. With very limited medical attention, thanks to my youth and generally good physical condition, I was able to overcome these illnesses just staying by myself in my hotel room.

An organization by the name of ORT, which was originally founded in Russia some time after the Russian revolution, started to give a course lasting eight months that would train young Jews as radio technicians. I decided to enroll in this course sometime in the Spring of 1942. One day, early in the summer, I received an order to present myself at a labor camp for foreigners. This was very unpleasant news to me, and I was not willing to give up my freedom in Marseille without a fight. Prior to reporting to this camp, I had to undergo a physical examination. On the day of my medical appointment, I made a cup of coffee for myself that was equivalent to the strength of ten cups. With the high price of coffee beans in those days, this little cup of coffee cost quite a fortune. I finished almost a

bottle of wine, and even though I was a non-smoker, I chain-smoked half a pack of cigarettes. In the doctor's waiting room, estimating when it would be my turn, I went to the men's room and did about fifty knee bends. I felt like I was in terrible shape. My heart was beating unbelievably fast. Alas, the doctor found me physically fit for labor camp! I refused to admit defeat, and made an appointment to see the president of the ORT. He gave me a letter stating that I was enrolled in their school, studying to be a radio technician. My assignment to the labor camp was deferred until my completion of school.

At one of my visits to see my father at the camp, Les Milles, in the beginning of August, 1942, I saw the camp surrounded by a special kind of French police called the Milice. This was the French equivalent to the German SS. No visitors were allowed, and I returned to Marseille. On August 14th, the first deportation started from the camp, Les Milles. No one actually knew the full meaning of it, but we were all fully aware that this was the beginning of the drastic deterioration of Jewish life in France. My father was confined in the camp infirmary at that time due to an asthmatic condition, and was spared from deportation. Right after the transport left, the Milice was removed and the regular guards resumed their duties. I was able to visit my father once again.

O R T

(Organisation - Reconstruction - Travail)

SOCIÉTÉ FRANÇAISE DE PROPAGATION DU TRAVAIL INDUSTRIEL ET AGRICOLE PARMİ LES JUİFS

Association enregistrée à la Préfecture de Police de la Seine le 10 Janvier 1921, N° 159.843

COMITÉ CENTRAL

INSTITUTIONS DE L'ORT EN FRANCE

TÉL. NATIONAL 05-82

ADRESSE TÉLÉGR. : ORTUNIO-MARSEILLE

PARIS

12, Rue des Saules.
7, Rue Georges-Lardennois.

MARSEILLE

3, Rue de la Guadeloupe
33, Rue Sylvabelle

LYON

61, Rue de l'Hôtel-de-Ville.

NICE

13, Avenue Durante.

TOULOUSE

9, Rue des Amidonniers.

LIMOGES

4, Rue du Mas-Rôme.

PERIGUEUX

17, Rue Béranger.

CLERMONT-FERRAND

CHAMALIERES
Chemin de la Papeterie

MONTPELLIER

44, Avenue Georges-Clémenceau.

BAGNERES-DE-LUCHON

31, Allées des Bains.

AGDE

20, Rue Poissonnerie.

MONTINTIN (Haute-Vienne)

par Magnacq-Vicq.

CHABANNES (Creuse)

par Saint-Pierre-de-Fursac.

COURET (Haute-Vienne)

par la Jonchère-Saint-Maurice.

CAMP DE RIVESALTES (H.-G.)

CAMP DE RECEBEDOU (H.-G.)

CAMP DE GURS (B.-P.)

CARRIERES-SUR-SEINE

Potager d'Apprentissage.

DOMAINE LA ROCHE (L.-et-G.)

par Penne d'Agenais. Ferme-Ecole.

DOMAINE CAMBES-DE-PUJOLS

(L.-et-G.)

par Villeneuve-Lot.

Centre d'Apprentissage Agricole.

DOMAINE AUX ANGIROUX

(L.-et-G.)

par Monbahus.

Centre d'Apprentissage Agricole.

MARSEILLE. LE

21, PLACE ALEXANDRE LABADIE

194

C E R T I F I C A T

Je soussigné, Professeur W. OUALID, Président de la
Société ORT, certifie par la présente que M. HALERDICH Erwin
demeurant au 10, rue Thubaneau est admis en qualité d'élève
au Centre de Reclassement Professionnel pour la formation de
préparateurs en Chimie Appliquée. Le Centre de Reclassement
Professionnel que notre Société organise actuellement 3, rue de
la Guadeloupe à Marseille comporte une section de Chimie Appliquée
d'une durée de huit mois, à raison de cinq heures de travail
par jour.

Fait à Marseille le 20 Février 1942

Le Président

(W. Oualid)

TRANSLATION

ORT

(Organization - Reconstruction - Work)

FRENCH SOCIETY FOR THE PREPARATION OF INDUSTRIAL AND
AGRICULTURAL WORK AMONG THE JEWS

CERTIFICATE

The undersigned, Professor W. OUALID, President of the ORT Society, certifies that MR. Erwin Halbreich, living at 10, rue Thubaneau, is registered as a student of Applied Chemistry at our Center of Professional Education. The center that our organization is presently forming at 3, rue de la Guadeloupe, Marseille, will have a course in Applied Chemistry of eight months duration, with five hours of instruction daily.

Signed in Harseille February 20, 1942

The resident

(W. Cualid)

As a result of my frequent visits to Les Milles, I knew many of the guards. I hoped that with a promise of financial compensation they would aid me to find a route of escape for my father. When I mentioned this idea to him, he disagreed with my plan. My father felt optimistic that his illness would protect him from being deported, and was unwilling to risk an escape when the outcome would be uncertain.

At the time I discussed the idea of escape with my father, he came up with a suggestion of his own. He had a diamond that he wanted to give to me. This stone originally belonged to my mother. It was removed from its setting, and had been hidden during the past few years as a button. My father had a shirt among his belongings from which the original buttons were removed. These were replaced with four peas and the diamond, encased in cloth, which outwardly appeared like five similar buttons. I refused to accept the stone, as I hoped that there might have been an occasion in the future when my father might use the diamond to buy his freedom.

Unfortunately, my father's faith and confidence that he would be saved in the future due to his asthmatic condition came to an end on August 28th, when he was deported. All I received was a brief letter stating that he was taken by surprise and on his way in the transport with an uncertain destination. I had no chance of a last visit and a final farewell. There was unfortunately nothing more I could do for him now.

My Journey to Switzerland

In the late summer of 1942 the first deportation started from the south of France. At the time, the Free French of Marechal Petain did all the details of the dirty work for Germany. I was living in Marseille and was among the first listed for deportation. Fortunately, on their first visit, the police did not find me at home. As a result, I received a warning from my landlady, and therefore could take some precautions and go into hiding for some time.

I found some shelter in a barn, in a suburb of Marseille, owned by a Jewish organization that operated an orphanage in the main building. We were several young men hiding there, waiting from one meal to the next, when after several days we saw Gendarmes on bicycles entering the grounds. We realized in no time that we were the ones privileged by those visitors. Before they even saw all of us, we escaped over walls and fences; only one of our companions was not lucky enough to get away in time.

I returned to Marseille and found refuge with some French, Gentile friends. This was a very temporary solution as I knew I would be welcome for a few days, rather than a few weeks or months. My great plan was to get over the Pyrenees to Spain and Portugal, and eventually to the United States. In no time, I realized that this was not a plan but a far-fetched dream. There was no way in which I could achieve this. I had to go to plan #2 - escape to Switzerland. In my opinion, Switzerland was no solution, just an extreme, temporary remedy. A country surrounded entirely by the German and Italian armies did not seem safe to me. I had a cousin in Lausanne, and I wrote to him to expect my visit. A precise arrival time was impossible for me to state because the whole trip had to be made illegally. I had in mind to cross the Alps, but where and how, needed more extensive planning.

My next step was to get a counterfeit LD. card of a man born in Alsace, to protect

my accent. It also had to be issued by a community whose records were destroyed during the war, to make any research in old files impossible. In a few days, I had my papers. As always, in Marseille, the most impossible was always attainable with money. I had heard very often that people in crossing the border to Switzerland were arrested by the Swiss, and returned to France. Being optimistic that I would succeed to get into Switzerland, I felt that it would be to my advantage to have some Swiss Francs. If I could purchase train tickets in the local currency, I would call less attention to myself. In the Black Market in Marseille, this Currency transaction was accomplished within hours.

Now I was ready to leave Marseille - but I heard a new rumor - that people were being arrested at the railroad station when attempting to board the train towards Switzerland. To play it safe, the evening before my planned departure I went to the railroad station to look over the situation for myself. To my pleasant surprise, I saw nothing at all to be concerned about, and noticed the safest approach to the platform was through the railroad restaurant. The next evening I arrived early at the station, had dinner at the restaurant before boarding the train, and left Marseille without any further incident.

After a short while on the train, I met some acquaintances of my own age from Marseille. Being on this train, heading in the direction of Switzerland, it was very obvious that we had the same goal in mind. Instead of traveling alone, I joined them, and we were now a foursome. In the early morning hours, we arrived in Grenoble. A number of Gendarmes boarded the train, and I became very agitated and nervous. I was trying to hide and didn't know where until I saw a Gendarme reading a newspaper on the station platform, near the steps of the railway car. I stood behind the Gendarme looking over his shoulder, pretending to read the paper with him. Standing so close to the Gendarme gave me a feeling of security, and I felt nobody would bother to ask me for identification. Shortly afterward, I re-boarded the train for our next stop, Aix-Les-Bains. Again, in arriving at Aix-Les-Bains a number of policemen boarded the train. I got scared, and even though my friends decided to continue on the trip, I debarked. I spent the night in a small hotel in Aix-Les-Bains, and left the next morning at about 5 A.M. It was customary that

searches for Jews were never started before 6 A.M., so as a precaution I started out extremely early to take the train to my next stop, Annecy.

The streets of Annecy were full of Jews, mostly of German or Austrian origin, all looking for contacts to escape to Switzerland. The talk in town was very pessimistic - people getting arrested on the way to Switzerland, or sent back from Switzerland if they were fortunate to have succeeded in crossing the border. It was out of the question to continue my trip by train. I went to a taxi stand and spoke with several cab drivers until I found one, in whom I felt I could have confidence. I discussed with him a plan to drive me to the border over secondary roads, to avoid road checks. His fare for this trip was an amount far beyond my means, and I started to look around for traveling companions to share expenses. I found a man and a woman - for me at that time elderly people - both well in their fifties, she weighing about 220 pounds and traveling with a small, white poodle. Neither of them spoke any French at all. I knew I was in dangerous company, but I had no choice. We decided to leave early the next morning, and I made departure arrangements with my cabby. Later in the evening, my traveling companions changed their minds and cancelled out on me. I did not have the nerve to face the cabby again, and left bright and early the next morning by train.

In no time, I found once again, my friends from Marseille on the train. When I tried to enter their compartment, they waved me away. Their behavior was very strange to me, and after a while I returned for an explanation. I heard that their papers had just been examined by a patrol who doubted their authenticity, but allowed them to continue their journey. They had only waved me away for my own good. By now I noticed that my friends were traveling in the company of a young French lady from Evian. They told me that they would be her houseguests. As Evian is only a few miles from the Swiss border, I saw a great opportunity and asked if there would be room for me too. After a brief discussion, I was accepted, and we continued on our way to Evian together. Within a couple of days our hostess found us a guide who would lead us to the Swiss border. We walked for several hours until our guide pointed out a road to us and explained that on the

other side was Switzerland.

I remember it as if it was yesterday. I was wearing a light beige trench coat. In one pocket, I had fried fish for provision, and the oil leaked through the paper and my pocket, leaving big stains on my coat. In my other pocket I had an alarm clock. Hidden in it were two checks in U.S. dollars, payable by a bank in New York.

Our guide left us. As by now evening was approaching, we found a barn nearby, still on French soil, and decided to spend the night there. The next morning we crossed the road into Switzerland. We began very bravely to climb the alps, because all the roads had border patrols posted on them. We spent most of the day climbing, and finally reached the peak of the mountain at an altitude of about 5,500 feet. We wanted to climb down the other side of the mountain, but noticed that the cliffs were too steep to climb down in darkness. We decided to remain where we were overnight. Each of us wrapped our arms and legs around a tree and spent the night talking to each other, fearful that we might fall asleep and tumble down the mountain. For the first time in my life I realized that thirst was worse than hunger, as we had gone almost 24 hours without anything to eat or drink. At daybreak, we decided to look for another way down the mountain that would not be as steep and dangerous. We walked all day, until we came to a small Swiss village called Bouveret. When knocking on a door, we found some very nice Swiss people who allowed us to clean up, and gave us some food and shelter for the night. The next morning, their young son walked with us for several miles to the next railway station, in Aigle. My Swiss Francs now came into good use. I purchased four tickets, for my friends and myself, to Lausanne. We all arrived there safely, and went our separate ways.

My Years in Switzerland

When I arrived in Lausanne in the beginning of October 1942, I was fortunate to have a relative living there who I could look up. This man, who had the unusual first name of Ottokar, was in his mid-fifties, originally from Czechoslovakia, and had been living in Lausanne since the beginning of 1939. He was actually not a blood relative of mine. Our relationship was through his wife who was a first cousin of my mother. They had met when she was working on her Ph.D. in Linguistics, and was supporting herself by giving French lessons. He was one of her students -- the son of a very affluent clothing manufacturer, about fifteen years her senior. The firm exported men's suits throughout Europe, North America, and the Near East. Ottokar was the outside man, and was always traveling. While he was on his last business trip away from home, Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia, and Ottokar never returned to his native town of Prossnitz. Through his international export connections, he had money allover in the West and was very well fixed financially.

With the help of this man, and the assistance of the Jewish community, I went to see the police in an attempt to legalize my stay in Lausanne. I was granted authorization to remain in the city. The stipulations were so unusual that I saved the paper, and still have it in my possession. The restrictions pertaining to my stay in Lausanne were, first of all, that I had to report to the police every Tuesday. I was not allowed to leave Lausanne without special authorization, and could not leave my residence between the hours of 10 p.m. and 8 a.m. I would have to apply all of my efforts to emigrate from Switzerland as soon as possible, and therefore to be extremely frugal so as to save all my means to finance this effort. Besides, I could not get married in Switzerland, and therefore I was not allowed to have any relationship that might lead to this forbidden end. I also was not permitted to be gainfully employed in Switzerland.

ENGAGEMENT.

Je soussigné..... **H A L B R E I C H Erwin. 1924**.....

..... **ressortissant allemand**

certifie avoir été informé par l'Of. de Police de l'Ar. Ter.1. que je pouvais
séjourné provisoirement à..... **chez Mlle. Bloch Blanche, Villa Chardonnat**
Av. Tissot 15 à Lausanne

sous surveillance militaire, aux conditions et déclarations suivantes, que je
m'engage à observer sur l'honneur :

1. Je m'annoncerai chaque..... **mardi**
2. Je ne peux pas quitter..... **Lausanne** sans avoir demandé et obtenu l'auto-
risation de l'Of. Pol. Ter. 1; toutes demandes à ce sujet devant être faite
à l'avance.
3. Je ne peux pas changer de domicile sans l'autorisation de l'Of. de Police Ter.1.
4. Je dois être constamment à mon domicile entre..... **2200 et 0800**, sauf auto-
risation de l'Of. de Police Ter. 1.
5. Je m'engage à observer toutes les prescriptions relatives à l'obscurcissement
général, entre 2300 et 0500 (Heure d'été)
6. Je m'engage à utiliser tout mon temps à poursuivre très activement toutes les
démarches utiles auprès des autorités consulaires.....
pour obtenir dans le plus bref délai possible les papiers de légitimation et
les visas nécessaires à mon départ de Suisse.
7. Je m'engage à ne pas faire de dépenses inutiles et à réserver mon argent pour
payer mon entretien en Suisse, mes frais de déplacements et ceux de départ.
8. Je prends l'engagement formel de respecter toutes les règles de l'hospitalité
vis-à-vis de la Suisse, en m'abstenant de tout acte qui pourrait lui être pré-
judiciable, notamment de toute activité politique quelconque ou recherche de
renseignements au profit de tiers.
9. Je prends enfin bonne note que, comme les internés qui se trouvent actuelle-
ment en Suisse et qui ne peuvent contacter mariage, toutes relations tendant
à cette fin sont interdites.
10. Je prends connaissance qu'en cas d'infraction aux présents engagements pour
quel motif que ce soit, le contrôle militaire sera renforcé, avec mesures res-
trictives aggravées en raison de la nature et du nombre d'infractions celles-
ci portant tout spécialement sur les points 1, 2 et 4.

Lausanne, le **10.10.42**

Le contractant :

Halbreich Erwin

Il s'engage :

Permanence Ar. Ter. 1.
L'Officier de Police :

Erwin Halbreich

[Signature]

TRANSLATION

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Erwin Halbreich, of German origin, certify that I was informed by the Police Department that I am allowed to reside temporarily at: Miss Blanche Bloch, Villa Chardonnet, 15 Tissot Avenue, Lausanne, under military surveillance, under the following conditions, which I promise to honor:

1. I will report every Tuesday.
2. I cannot leave Lausanne without having requested and received an authorization from the Police Department. All the requests have to be made in advance.
3. I cannot change my residence without authorization from the Police Department.
4. I have to be at my residence from 10:00 P.M. until 8:00 A.M. unless I am otherwise authorized by the Police Department.
5. I will observe all the laws about the general blackout from 11:00 P.M. until 5:00 A.M. (summer time).
6. I promise to use all my time and efforts to actively request from consular authorities a visa to ensure my earliest departure from Switzerland.
7. I promise I will not incur any unnecessary expenses in Switzerland, and save my money to maintain my stay, and also my departure, from Switzerland.
8. I agree that I will obey all the laws of Swiss hospitality and will not engage in any activity that could be harmful to Switzerland, and especially, I will not engage in any political activity, and will not attempt to obtain any information which could be beneficial to a third party.
9. I take notice that like all interned refugees in Switzerland at the present time, I am forbidden to entertain

any relationship that could lead to matrimony.

10. I take notice that in case of breaking any of the above-mentioned rules, especially numbers 1, 2 and 4, military measures will be taken against me.

Lausanne 10/10/42
Police Department

Shortly before my father was deported from Les Milles, we made a plan in case difficulties arose which would prevent us from communicating. We arranged to use the address of our relative in neutral Switzerland, as a safe way of writing to one another. While I was staying there; I received three postcards from my father, which were written in October and November of 1942, and January 1943. All three cards contained about the same basic message, "I am in good health and working in my profession." It was obvious that my father had worded them carefully so that they would not be stopped by the German censorship, which existed during that time. The postmarks on the cards from Katowice and Gross-Strotz were very legible; both located within a few miles of Auschwitz. The return name and address looked fictitious to me, but nevertheless I replied, and my postcards were returned with the stamp, "Addressee Unknown". I never had any doubt that these cards were in my father's handwriting. Apparently they were smuggled out of a concentration camp somehow, and mailed, as I am sure it was forbidden to send or receive mail in such camps.

With aid from my relative I enrolled in a private commercial school, and by the end of October, I started to take a number of business courses. My schooling was of a rather short duration. At the beginning of November, I received an order to report to the reception camp in Adliswill, near Zurich. This was the beginning of my internment in Switzerland, and was not to end until after the war was over, almost three and a half years later.

The camp of Adliswill was located in an old factory, and was intended to be for men only. The inmates were, for the vast majority Jewish, mostly from Germany and Austria. We also had a small number of non-Jewish political refugees. There were several dormitories, each one accommodating more than one hundred men. We slept in tremendous bins, covered only with plain straw. Washing facilities were outdoors, under open sky, and it was rather chilly in November. Our toilet facilities were latrines, in a different building than the sleeping quarters.

The main meal, served around noontime, consisted mostly of soup, cabbage and

potatoes. The work we had to do was minute, just some camp maintenance and kitchen duties. All work was done on a voluntary or assigned basis, not more than one day a week. The whole camp was under the direction, guard, and operation of the Swiss Army. The conditions we lived in were less than ideal, food was limited due to war restrictions, but in comparison to German concentration camps, we were living in Paradise!

Within a short time, on December 1st, I was transferred *to* another camp, Girenbad, south of Zurich. Girenbad was located at an altitude of about 2400 feet. In mid-winter, for a couple of hours around noontime, it was hot enough for sunbathing. This camp was smaller in size than Adliswill. We were housed in a similar way, in a factory, but all of the dormitories were much smaller. The whole camp seemed much better organized. Two offices administered the camp. The first, was a Swiss army office, headed by a captain. The other was a Refugee office, which strictly handled internal matters.

We had an entertainment group composed of inmates, including a number of professional actors, singers, dancers and other performing artists. A member of this group was Josef Schmidt, at that time a tenor renowned throughout Europe. This man, due to his exceptionally short stature, could not fit into any opera performances. His entire reputation was based on concerts and recordings. Unfortunately, Schmidt became ill while interned in this camp, and died within a short time at a relatively young age.

By now I considered myself a camp veteran. I did not like the idea of being drafted occasionally for different jobs. I preferred to have continuous



1943

At Camp Girenbad, near Zurich

Top: Author at left

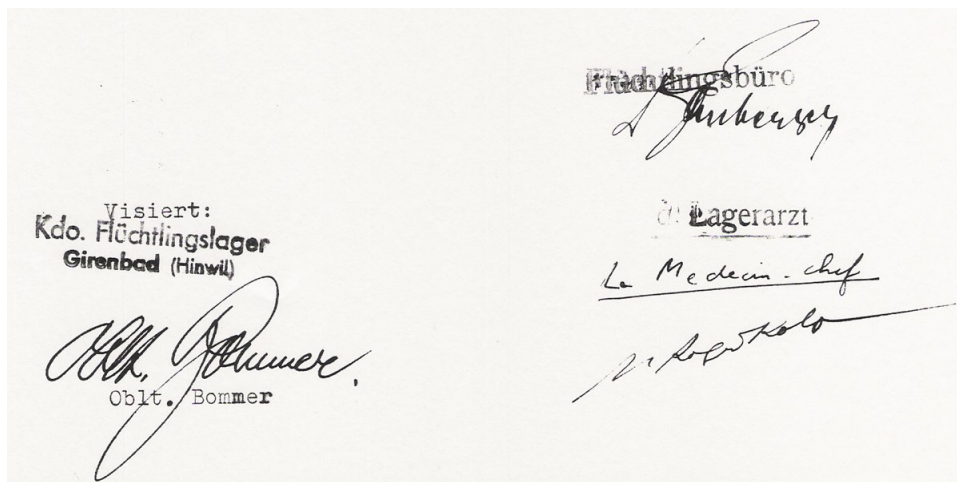
Bottom: Author 2nd from left in front row

Fluchtlingslager Girenbad
Hinwil - Zurich
Fluchtlingsburo

den 27. April 1943

Herrn
Erwin Halbreich
Girenbad
-.-.-.-.-

Wir bestatigen Ihnen gerne, dass Ihr Verhalten wahrend Ihres Aufenthaltes in unserem Lager vom 1. Dezember 1942 bis zum heutigen Tage stets ein untadelig korrektes gewesen ist. Durch Ihre fleissige Arbeit im Fluchtlingsburo haben Sie sich sehr verdient gemacht. Besonders aner kennenswert jedoch war Ihre Tatigkeit als Krankenwarter, wo Sie samtliche Ihnen ubertragenen Auf gaben zur allgemeinen Zufriedenheit-durchfUhrten. Wir danken Ihnen im _amen aller Kameraden und speziell des Krankenzir_ers und wtinschen Ihnen im ferneren Leben allea Gute



TRANSLATION

Refugee Camp Girenbad
Hinwil – Zurich
Refugee Office

April 27, 1943

Mr.
Erwin Halbreich
Girenbad

We are pleased to confirm that your conduct during your stay at this camp from December 1, 1942 until today was beyond reproach.

Through your diligent work at the Refugee Office you earned great merit. Especially appreciated was your work in the Infirmary, where all your chores were executed with total satisfaction.

We thank you _n the name of all our colleagues, especially those in the Infirmary and wishing you all the best in the future.

(Signed)

Refugee Office

Camp Doctor

Camp Commendant

work assignments, even though there was no financial compensation. Within a short time, I succeeded in getting myself a job in the Refugee office. A plan was under discussion to give all the internees under the age of twenty-one a furlough of three days, with a paid railroad ticket. I was put in charge to implement this plan. Conditions were that we would have to be divided into two groups. The second group could not leave until all the participants in the first group returned to camp. We were not restricted to traveling as a group; each young man could be on his own. To play it safe, I put myself in the first group, which turned out to be foresighted, as the departure of the second group was cancelled, for reasons I no longer remember.

My financial situation was in very poor shape. An organization of free Poles, headquartered in England, paid a small monthly allowance to all Polish internees through their representative in Berne. A friend of mine suggested that I should apply for their benefits. - As many of my camp mates were fluent in Polish, one of them wrote a long letter in my behalf stating that I was a Polish citizen, lived with my grandparents in Poland and had attended school there for several years. I was afraid to sign and mail this letter, as I did not speak a word of Polish, and I feared that one day a representative might appear in camp and try to talk with me. I was assured that it would not happen, and it proved to be quite correct. Within a short time I started to receive a monthly allowance. It was not much, but to me, extremely helpful.

To obtain a pass for a day's trip to Zurich was not too difficult. The procedure entailed that several of us could leave in a small group, escorted by a Swiss soldier. The soldier's orders were to remain with us for the whole day. But generally, we were free of the escort during the day, and met again at the Zurich railroad station in the evening, before returning to camp.

After I worked for some time in the Refugee office, I was successful in obtaining a pass for myself, signed by the Swiss captain, which allowed me to leave the camp without military escort, for half a day, to the nearest village. Somehow, the man in charge of the

Refugee office noticed that I had a pass without escort and felt that it was an oversight by the captain to sign it. He insisted that the pass be reissued to include an escort. Realizing that my fellow internee was stricter than the Swiss captain, I resigned my job at the office and I did not want to be associated with this person any longer.

We had the infirmary at the camp that was run by two Swiss medics and was occasionally visited by a physician. As an opening occurred for an assistant, I volunteered for the job and was accepted. I had to do all of the dirty work, but in return I received Swiss Army food, which was quite superior to ours. I enjoyed the work, and the atmosphere was quite congenial.

We were forbidden to purchase any rationed food on the outside and bring it back to camp. A soldier always guarded the gate, and the stricter ones confiscated any forbidden purchases. Whenever an errand had to be done outside the camp I went with the Swiss medics. If I had an illegal purchase, the medics carried it into the camp for me, so I never risked confrontation.

The job of night watchman was filled by one of our internees. Part of his duties was to wake us up in the morning. This was very pleasantly done, as our watchman was an accordion player, and we were awakened in the morning by different tunes. Incidentally, I met him again in New York after the war, and heard that his first job in the States was also involved with music, as a disk jockey for a radio station in Boston

In the Spring of 1943, my stay in Girenbad came to an end. On April 28th, I was transferred to a work camp, Mezzovico Tessin. It was located in the southern part of Switzerland, about ten miles north of Lugano. We were no longer under military jurisdiction, and everything was handled by a civilian branch of the government' especially created for this purpose.

There were approximately one hundred and eighty men in this camp, housed in four barracks. We slept in tremendous double-decker bunks equipped with separate straw

mattresses. Each internee had a small personal closet. In addition, there were individual buildings which housed the kitchen, mess hall, latrine, office, stock room, and the, Swiss administrator. Everything was brand new and had been assembled from prefabricated sections. In this camp we had no more guards. The entire Swiss staff was limited to two or three men.

This camp was located between the Gotthard railroad line and a small brook (which later supplied the kitchen staff, of which I became a member, with delicious trout). At the beginning of the summer, we used one branch of this shallow brook to build our private swimming pool. This was done by excavating the brook, and boarding up one portion, with reinforcements of rocks and earth, to create a depth suitable for swimming.

Alongside the camp, a mountain range rose to a height of approximately 7,000 feet. We were blessed with a very pleasant climate. It was normally hot around noontime during the summer; the evenings and nights cooled off comfortably, and the humidity was very low. The winters were very mild, and the temperature generally stayed far above freezing. On weekends, we were allowed to go for a day, or the whole weekend, to Lugano, one of the most beautiful resorts in Switzerland.

As this was a labor camp, we all had certain work assignments. The aim was to irrigate and cultivate the land. In addition, we were involved with the daily maintenance of the camp. Driving through the area forty years later, I saw a small canal that we had built, which was still in use. We were divided into a small work detail of about twelve men, and each group had a foreman. My foreman was a Viennese, in his early thirties, who had served in the French Foreign Legion. He acted like a tough guy, but basically was pretty good-natured, and treated me like an older brother.

One day, we had to remove a tree stump deeply imbedded in the soil with long roots. For this purpose, we used a special piece of machinery, which constantly had to be adjusted. I volunteered for this job, but my foreman wouldn't let me do it as he considered

this job too dangerous for me at my young age. Instead, he took the assignment upon himself, and had an accident, which resulted in his dislocating one shoulder, and incapacitated him for a couple of weeks. After witnessing the accident, I had enough of this kind of work, and at the first opportunity I volunteered to work in the kitchen. The work hours were a little longer, sometimes I had to work on weekends, but I was happier.

At the beginning, we had a German chef who was in his mid-forties, which at that time, I considered old. He was pretty strict with his crew, but fair. Soon, a French chef replaced him, in his mid-twenties. The atmosphere turned more congenial and the food improved too, especially for the kitchen crew.

One incident occurred when I worked in the kitchen, which is still very vivid in my mind. Our main meal was served at lunchtime. On this particular day, we had prepared and served a breaded filet of fish. From all sides we heard-complaints about the taste of the fish. After a careful investigation we found out that we had two look-a-like containers. One contained flour, the other contained scouring powder. No wonder the fish tasted funny; we had plenty of flour left, but were very short on scouring powder! The results of our investigation never left the kitchen door.

1944

Camp Mezzovico



Top: Working in the Kitchen

Bottom Left: Serving food

Bottom Right: The kitchen crew

For the first time, in this camp we received some small wages, which gave us some pocket money. This allowed me to see my brother once in a while, who was then in a children's home in Ascona, a very scenic spot on the Lago Maggiore, not too far from Mezzovico.

In this camp, the feeling of imprisonment was no longer as strong. We had a number of restrictions, but in my free time I could go to the nearest village without requesting any permission. Occasionally I had access to a bicycle and could pedal around in the vicinity.

Some of us worked right near the railroad tracks. This line was the main connection between Italy and Germany. One day, a Red Cross train moved from Italy to Germany, full with German soldiers, probably injured from fighting in southern Italy after the Allies had landed there. A few of our men cursed the soldiers, and threw pebbles at the train. A couple of weeks later, the camp was sealed off by Swiss troops. All of the men who were working near the railroad tracks were transferred to a punitive camp. Shortly after this incident, the Allies landed in the north of France, and the Swiss turned very liberal in their treatment of all internees.

At about this time, a friend of mine made plans to leave Switzerland illegally for France, to join the Maquis (the French resistance forces) to fight the Germans. I considered joining him until I was told that it was questionable the Maquis would accept and trust me, because I was born in Germany. My friend, born in Belgium, did not face this problem. Evaluating this situation, I decided the risks involved were just too many, and I abandoned the idea. My friend succeeded with his plan. After the war, I met him again in Brussels and learned that this experience, which started with enthusiasm, ended disappointingly for him. I am happy to report that I became reacquainted with several of my friends from Mezzovico, in New York, and we remain friends to this day.

This is an Identity Document issued by the Swiss Authorities. All refugees were required to have this booklet, which had to be shown on request to police or military patrols.

The different confinement camps had to be entered, as can be seen on page 10 of this document, shown below.



Flüchtlingsausweis
Livret pour réfugiés
Libretto per rifugiati

Aufenthalt in Lagern und Heimen: Séjour dans des camps et homes: Soggiorni in campi e ricoveri:		
Bezeichnung des Lagers oder Heimes Désignation du camp ou du home Designazione del campo o del ricovero	Datum des Eintritts Date d'entrée Data dell'entrata	Datum des Austritts Date de sortie Data dell'uscita
Arbeitslager für Internierte MEZZOVICO-VIRA	28.9.1943	20.9.44
Rivera-Bironico Schul- und Arbeitslager WALLISELEN (Zürich)	21.9.1944	

— 10 —

After almost a year and a half, the end of my stay in Mezzovico was approaching. In September 1944, I was transferred to a camp in Wallisellen again in the vicinity of Zurich. I had applied to learn tailoring, and this camp was especially created as a school and workshop camp. I was among the first arrivals. Everything was brand new. We even had some barracks consisting of semi-private rooms provided with double-decker bunks. The rooms were meant for people who would study in different schools in Zurich, in order to give them more privacy for their studies. After a while I succeeded, whenever a vacancy occurred, to avail myself of a place in these rooms, on a temporary basis. At one time, my brother came up to see me from Ascona, and I was able to get a room for the two of us. This was to a great financial advantage, as it was much cheaper to take the train to Zurich than to pay for a hotel room there.

Within a short time of my arrival, the classes started. As I was now a student, or apprentice, my pay was cut. Naturally I did not like this and found a way to overcome it within a short time. All my classmates started tailoring from scratch, but as I had worked as an apprentice for several months in Antwerp, with my father as my tutor, I was far ahead of my class. With a lot of pushing, I was able to graduate within a short time, as the first of my class. I was transferred to the regular workshop, where workings with experienced tailors I was still able to learn, and at the same time, get a higher pay. Besides, in this shop all men did extra private work for additional income, and being part of the crowd, I got my share.

One of our colleagues was in charge of buying provisions for the kitchen. Meat was rationed, but he discovered that our coupons would buy twice as much horsemeat as other meat. In addition, it was much cheaper than beef. Soon, we were given horsemeat, but unfortunately it must have been from horses that died from old age, as the meat was extremely tough and chewy. In protest, whenever this meat was served we showed our displeasure by stamping our feet and neighing, but it was to no avail; the horsemeat stayed on our menu.

In this camp, I was pretty active, well known and well liked. As an extra activity, I operated the canteen; mostly selling cigarettes, tobaccos, shaving supplies, etc. As this was voluntary on my part, there was no pay involved, and I had to give up some of my free time. But one of the benefits was that I got half a day off once in a while to go on a buying trip to Zurich, and I was supplied with a paid railroad ticket.

This camp was comparatively small. It most of the time housed from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty men. As the war was then almost over, the atmosphere was quite different than in the previous camps. We had a number of people who were well educated, well informed and politically active, ranging from the right to the extreme left. I became friendly with all kinds of people, and the time spent in this camp was quite educational for me, far beyond tailoring. Here I learned to play bridge, and many late nights were spent playing cards.

In Zurich, I took advantage of the opportunity of going to the theater. At that time, it had the best German language performances, as many of the actors were refugees from Berlin and Vienna. For the first, and only, time in my life I saw a movie house where the roof opened in nice weather, and the shows were held under the open sky in the evenings.

Occasionally, I went with a friend to Zurich with the aim to meet girls. We had developed our own approach, which involved going to a tearoom in the afternoon. If we saw, in the half empty tearoom, two attractive girls at one table, we just walked over requesting their permission to share their table. Generally, this gave us a good start to get acquainted.

1945



At the Camp Jallisellen. Author seated at bottom right.



At the shore of Lake Zurich. Author at left with friends from Camp Wallisellen.

The following page shows the results of an election of a representative from the work camp, Wallisellen, to attend a meeting of delegates of all camps in Switzerland. The purpose of the meeting was to pave the way for post war emigration from Switzerland, as our further stay was very much discouraged.

I was one of the two elected delegates chosen to represent the camp of Nallisellen at a

conference in Spiez, in the Berner Oberland.

Schul- und Werkstättenlager Wallisellen

5.6.45

P r o t o k o l l

Am Dienstag, den 5.6.45, fand im Lager Wallisellen die Wahl für die Flüchtlingsvertretung für Rück- und Weiterwanderungsfragen statt.

Um 12 Uhr wurden die Kandidatenlisten veröffentlicht, die wir in der Anlage beifügen.

Die Kandidaten

Gutmann, Wolfgang
Kellner, Gottfried
Kolb, Hermann
Kuderer, Susanne

erklärten, dass sie eine Wahl nicht annehmen würden und baten, sie von der Kandidatenliste zustreichen. Ihr Entschluss wurde während des gemeinsamen Mittagessens von Hans Pollatschek bekanntgegeben, worauf ihre Namen von den Kandidatenlisten gestrichen wurden. Anschliessend las Pollatschek noch einmal die Wahlstatuten vor.

Die Wahl fand statt zwischen 13 und 14 Uhr und brachte folgendes Ergebnis:

Wahlberechtigt	=	103 Stimmen
Abgegebene Stimmen	=	94
Gültige Stimmen	=	93
Absolutes Mehr	=	47

Wahlbeteiligung insgesamt: 95,79 %.

G e w ä h l t wurden:

Als Delegierte:

Halbreich, Erwin	ZL 8734 =	76 Stimmen
Mayer, Hans Dr.,	ZL 1112 =	53 Stimmen

Als Stellvertreter:

Friedrich, Ernst	ZL 426 =	52 Stimmen
Eksl, Josef	ZL 9746 =	51 Stimmen

Weitere Stimmen haben erhalten:

Cahn, Ludwig	ZL 4404 =	41 Stimmen
Cohen, Harry	ZL 3350 =	36 Stimmen
Scherz, Sally	ZL 4804 =	35 Stimmen

Die Lagerleitung:

Das Wahlbüro:

Karl Kolb

Hans Pollatschek, Jakob Widmann



Eidgenössisches Justiz- und Polizeidepartement
Polizeiabteilung
ZENTRALLEITUNG DER ARBEITSLAGER
Département fédéral de justice et police
Division de police
DIRECTION CENTRALE DES CAMPS DE TRAVAIL
Dipartimento federale di giustizia e polizia
Divisione della polizia
DIREZIONE CENTRALE DEI CAMPI DI LAVORO

Zurich, le 7 décembre 1945.

Monsieur Erwin HALBREICH,
Camp-Ecole et Ateliers de
WALLISELLEN (Zurich)

Referenz: ZL 8734/N/RF/cv

Bitte in der Antwort angeben
A indiquer dans la réponse
Pregasi ripetere nella risposta

C e r t i f i c a t

Nous certifions que vous vous êtes réfugié en Suisse et que vous avez séjourné du 28 avril 1943 au 21 septembre 1944 au camp de travail de Mezzovico-Vira (Tessin). Depuis le 22 septembre 1944, vous vous trouvez au camp-école et ateliers de Wallisellen où vous travaillez, en qualité de tailleur, à l'atelier de couture.

Votre conduite, dans les deux camps précités, nous a donné entière satisfaction. Aucun rapport défavorable nous est parvenu à votre sujet. Nous tenons à souligner que vous n'avez jamais exercé d'activité politique en Suisse. Les travaux qui vous sont confiés à l'atelier de couture de Wallisellen sont exécutés avec habileté, zèle et pleine conscience de vos devoirs.

DIRECTION CENTRALE DES CAMPS DE TRAVAIL

Le Chef:

Otto Zaugg
Otto Zaugg

TRANSLATION

Department of Justice & Folicc
Central Division of Workcamps

Zurich, December 7, 1945

Erwin HALBREICH
School & Workshop Camp
WALLISELLEN (Zurich)

Certificate

We are confirming that you have taken refuge in Switzerland, and that from April 28, 1943 until September 21, 194_ you were at the work camp Mezzovico-Vira - (Tessin). On September 22, 1944 you were transferred to the school and workshop camp, Wallisellen, where you are presently working as a tailor in the workshop.

Your conduct at these two camps has given us total satisfaction. We have never received any negative report about you. We would like to underline that you were never politically active. The work assigned to you at the workshop in Wallisellen has been promptly, and very conscientiously executed, to our full satisfaction.

CENTRAL DIRECTION OF
WORKCAMPS
The Director:

Otto Zaugg

By the war's end, in May 1945, many discussions started to develop about the future of the internees. Basically, the intention of Switzerland was- not to keep us after the war. The majority of us, fleeing from Nazi persecution from country to country, over a period of several years, were in a quandary about which country to go to. In addition, it was not just our decision -- it was extremely questionable if the country of our choice would accept us. To discuss this situation a meeting was held in Spiez, not far from Interlaken. Each camp was supposed to send two delegates. We had an election in our camp in order to choose them. I was one of many candidates. Even though I was the youngest, I won, receiving the highest number of votes of all the candidates. As my co-representative, a man was elected who later on became a professor at the Free University of Berlin. The meeting in Spiez was exactly what I expected. Several hundred people were present, a lot of speeches were made, but in the long run nothing was accomplished for our future. From the beginning, I had considered this gathering as a free vacation

Sometime in 1945, after the war was over in Europe a lot of G.I.'s received short-term furloughs to Switzerland. They were easy to spot in Zurich, as they had to wear their uniforms. As many of us were interested in emigrating to the States, we eagerly approached them to get first hand information. After a while, a friend and I turned this into a lucrative business. Most of the G.I.'s were interested in buying Swiss watches. They had little cash, but lots of chewing gum, condoms, and Parker 51 fountain pens. We bought these items from the soldiers and resold them in our camp at a small profit.

I had a number of friends who returned to Belgium. All reports from them were that they did exceptionally well financially. In retrospect, I believe that those reports were heavily exaggerated, but at the time I was young and gullible. I filed an application with the U.S. Consulate in Zurich for a quota number so that I could emigrate to the States. I also wrote to relatives in New York for affidavits guaranteeing that I would not be a financial burden to any public agency. At the same time, I applied to the Belgian authorities in Brussels to be- re-admitted to Belgium. My application to Belgium was rejected; and-my relatives in New York procrastinated endlessly in sending the papers to me. I appealed the Belgian decision through friends and legal channels in Brussels, to no

avail.

It was now the end of 1945. The war ended almost six months earlier, and for me it was the fourth year of interment in a camp. I could not see any solution for my future, and became extremely restless. I must have expressed to several people my intention that if everything else failed, in the near future I would return illegally to Belgium. One of my former colleagues in the tailor shop who had returned to Brussels heard about it and got in touch with me. He asked me if I would bring his fiancée with me whenever I returned to - Brussels. I heard that many young children were sent from Belgium in large groups to Switzerland for vacation and recuperation from their suffering during the war years. The program was under the auspices of the Red Cross. I decided to join one of their returning transports from Basel, pretending to be one of the people supervising the convoy.

First, I had to see the most advantageous way of getting the little money I had saved up, to Belgium. I heard that if I could buy gold in Switzerland and take it with me to Belgium, I would make a nice financial profit. Through a Swiss friend of mine whose father did business with one of the major Swiss banks, I was able to buy ten Swiss twenty franc gold coins at the official rate a transaction that I could not have achieved by myself. Later on, when I reached Brussels; I found out that I had made the right move.

Within a short time, I heard about another children's transport returning from Basel to Brussels. I made arrangements with the young woman to go to Basel. It was now the beginning of February 1946. Basel has an international railroad station. Some of the platforms belong to Switzerland, others to France and Germany. When we explained to the Border Control that we were with---children, we had no trouble to board the train. Not only was I an illegal passenger on the train, but it was- illegal to transport gold from Switzerland to Belgium. My gold pieces were well hidden in a tube of toothpaste, which was with other toilet articles in an attaché case.

Our prearranged plan was to leave the train in Namur, shortly past the Belgian border, where my travel companion's finance was supposed to meet us. After a very long

journey, as travel conditions still were very poor due to the affects of the war years, we finally arrived in Namur. In the excitement of getting off the train, I forgot my briefcase, which contained my toothpaste that held the gold pieces. Fortunately, I noticed it before the train left. I rushed back to retrieve it, and got off just in time, holding all my capital in my hand. We met my friend as planned, and took the next train to Brussels, arriving there within a couple of hours. After three and a half years of internment, I was ready to start my post war life as an illegal immigrant in Brussels.

The Post War Years

When I was still in Wallisellen, Switzerland, Koppel, one of the fellows I met in the tailor shop there, returned to his home in Brussels. We corresponded, and when he heard that I intended to go to Belgium he offered that I could stay with him upon my arrival in Brussels. I was unaware of how generous his invitation was until I saw his apartment. He was living with his mother and two younger sisters. His father had perished in a concentration camp while his mother and sisters were in hiding, in Belgium, during the war. To make room for me, the sleeping accommodations of the entire family had to be rearranged, and I shared a large bed with my friend.

A frequent visitor to this household was a young man in British uniform. This young soldier was stationed in Brussels as a member of the Jewish Brigade of Palestine, which fought during the war with the British forces. He was engaged to my friend's older sister, who was then nineteen years old. Within a few months, the young couple got married, and left for Palestine. Unfortunately, soon afterwards, I heard very shocking news. My friend's brother-in-law, while riding to work in a truck, was killed, during an Arab ambush. His young widow, was expecting a baby and was left alone in a foreign land without a father for her unborn child. Koppel left Brussels within a short time with the rest of his family, to join his sister in Palestine. Sad to say, I never heard from him after his departure from Belgium. My attempts to trace him, when I was in Israel in 1985, were without success.

I then sought to legalize my stay in Brussels. In Belgium, every person was required to carry an identity card at all times. Through friends, I was advised to look for a certain clerk in City Hall who, for a small gratuity, would pave my way to a legal status. I received a white identity card, model B. This was the lowest class available and did not entitle me to work legally.

It was now time for me to get at least a furnished room for myself, and no longer to

impose on my host. I found a room advertised as a "pied a terre" in the vicinity of the Gare du Nord, the "red light" district of Brussels. As I had rented the room in the morning, I was unaware of the characteristics of the neighborhood. Besides this, I was uninformed about the meanings of the phrase "pied a terre." This expression is generally used to describe a room, or apartment, rented by a married man to use once or twice a week with his mistress. As a result, I was not too happy with my living quarters, and my landlord never had in mind to get tenant who would actually live in the room.

I made my first attempt to earn some money as a traveling salesman. I received two lines; one of ladies' silk blouses, and the other of leather goods. My territory was outside of Brussels. I worked strictly on commission, and was not given any compensation for my traveling and other expenses. After several days passed, I had incurred expenses, wasted time, and had not received one single order. Not familiar with the products I was trying to sell, I asked several friends for their opinion of my merchandise. They told me the goods lacked appeal and were overpriced. I returned everything, and wrote it off as a new experience.

I had an old friend in Brussels who I had originally met in 1941, in Marseille. One evening we went to a German Jewish cabaret where I saw a couple that I also knew from Marseille. In the conversation that developed, I learned that they had a large apartment, and were willing to rent me a room where I could live and also work. For this sparsely furnished room I paid a top price, but this Viennese woman also volunteered to cook for me, so I figured that it would work out satisfactorily.

Now that I was going to have a more permanent residence, I decided it was time for me to get my belongings from Switzerland. They were mostly personal effects, which consisted of several trunks, and a used sewing machine, which I had purchased shortly before my departure, as I heard it would be more costly in Belgium. Today, in retrospect, when I think that most of those personal belongings were in shipment from 1939, first from Berlin to Antwerp, then to the south of France, afterwards to Switzerland, and now

back to Belgium, and most later on to New York, I believe the freight and storage expenses incurred during all those years must have been far greater than the actual value of the goods involved. Within a few weeks, I received everything from Switzerland, and was ready to start working. My goal was to work at home as a tailor for other custom tailors. This homework was quite customary in Belgium. When I was busy, I worked very long days, and had one or two women helping me as finishers, doing most of the hand work, while I worked on the machine and did the pressing. I supported myself, but made nothing close to the big money I had dreamed about.

I was working illegally, and although I applied for a working permit, I never received a reply of any kind. Indirectly, I was advised not to insist too much as I would be better off to have a request pending, than to get a reply that would be negative.

I enjoyed living in Brussels, which I considered as a little Paris, and it was a fun city to be in as a young man. I lived only a short trolley ride, or a half hour walk, from the center of town. There were many dance halls in the city; some were meant for going to meet people, others were more appropriate to go with a date. The many movie theaters played French as well as American pictures.

There were a number of small theaters, an opera house, and several museums. Once a year there was a Jewish affair, where one could meet most of the younger Jewish population. Occasionally, I played bridge in a small club. Most of my friends frequented the same places and I was always bound to see familiar faces without making any prior arrangements. Telephone appointments were extremely limited, as the majority of my friends had no telephone. An after-effect of the war was a shortage of telephones. They were only available for businesses or for medical reasons.

After being confined to camps for three and a half years, and before that, living under Nazi occupation, I began to enjoy my newly found freedom. Unfortunately, within a short time it became a freedom without a future. I had a very strong desire, after all the uncertain war years, to become a legal citizen in every aspect. Not only was I without

working papers, but on my next request to extend my authorization to live in Brussels, I was given a red stamp on my identity card which said, "Has to emigrate." There was no deadline given to me, but the whole procedure disappointed me deeply. To protect myself for the future, I had my quota registration number from the U.S. Consulate in Zurich transferred to the Consulate in Antwerp, and I wrote once again to my relatives in New York for papers. Somehow, I got in touch with a friend of my father who lived in New York. This man, who was born in Poland, and later on lived in Berlin, left Germany shortly after Hitler came to power, for Antwerp as a diamond dealer, and was also involved in currency transactions from Germany to Belgium. When the Germans invaded Belgium in May, 1940, he was fortunate to be one of the few people to escape in time, with his family. After a long, long journey, through France, Spain and Portugal, he was successful in arriving in New York.

This man came to Antwerp in 1947 for a two-fold mission. First, to dispose of his apartment building that he had left in haste in 1940, which had survived the war, after housing German officers during the occupation. I knew this building well, because my father and I stayed with him when we first came to Antwerp in 1939. His second reason for coming to Antwerp was to buy diamonds to import to New York. At this time, he was a member of the Diamond Dealers' Club, on 47th Street in New York, part of the biggest diamond market in the world. During his visit, he promised to send me papers to come to the states, and I felt a little more comfortable knowing that I had two potentials for getting affidavits.

At about this time, I heard mention of a man in Brussels, a concentration camp survivor, whose name sounded very familiar to me. Upon further inquiry, I met him, and my assumption proved quite correct. I had originally met him in 1941 in the camp, Les Milles. He and his brother, who were about eight and ten years my senior, were born in Vienna, and occupied the cots next to my father. This man now looked much older than his age of thirty-three years. His younger brother had perished in Aushwitz, and he miraculously survived. In Auschwitz, he had seen my father many times, until my father

was transferred to Birkenau. He was the only survivor I ever encountered to give me an eyewitness account of seeing my father in a concentration camp. By this time I had done my own research through the International Red Cross in Geneva, and with the assistance of a friend living in Germany, with the Bureau of Missing Persons. The results were very accurate, which unfortunately was what I was afraid of hearing. In February of 1945, only a short time before the Liberation, and after suffering for about two and a half years in concentration camps, my father died in Dachau. This brought an end to all of my hopes of ever seeing him again.

Shortly before I left Switzerland, my brother went from Ascona to Geneva, in order to continue his schooling. I advised him to register with the U.S. Consulate in Zurich, for a quota number. At about this time, I was in contact with a family friend in Los Angeles, who offered to send me affidavits to come to the States. As I had already been assured papers from other sources, I thanked him for his offer, and asked if he could provide papers for my brother instead, who was still in need of an affidavit. My brother received the papers promptly.

Tailoring was very slow in the early summer of 1947, and I heard of many people doing very well making plastic handbags. To take advantage of this trend, I started to do contract work for a small manufacturer. Once you know how to operate a sewing machine, it is pretty much routine work to sew plastic. There was quite a lot of footwork involved, as my sewing machine, as most others at that time in Belgium, was not equipped with an electric motor.

After a few weeks, I copied all the patterns of the bags I made, and went into business for myself. To get a better price, and to have more of a variety of colors, I bought quite a lot of plastic piece goods. My timing proved to be poor. Through an over supply, the price of plastic dropped drastically. After a long struggle, I sold everything. Considering my efforts, and the work involved, I hardly broke even.

In the Spring of 1948, I heard that my brother planned to spend a couple of days in Paris. I thought that it would be nice to meet him there. Unfortunately, time was too short for me to get the required visa, I figured this minor technicality would not stop me, and I planned once more to make an illegal trip. From Brussels, I took an express train, with a valid passport, but without a visa to Paris. While the train was at the border, I spent an extended period of time in the bathroom. In leaving the bathroom, I was proud of myself, when seeing the back of the Border Control leaving my railroad car. I returned to my compartment to relax, and awaited my arrival in Paris. Within a couple of minutes, a man in uniform entered my compartment and announced, "passports please." I realized that what I had taken for the border control before was actually the customs inspection. No explanation was helpful for me. As I did not have the required visa, my passport was confiscated, and I was told to pick it up in Paris, upon arrival, at the police station near the railroad terminal. I saw my brother for a few minutes and then rushed to the police station. This proved to be another mistake. I was promptly arrested, and held overnight. During the time of my incarceration, my belt and razor blades were taken away, even though I assured them that I had no suicidal tendencies. There were a couple of cells in the police station, and the one for women, especially, was kept extremely busy. All night long prostitutes were brought in. The next morning, I was escorted to the police station, and shipped back on the first available train to Brussels. I was put into a first class compartment. As my ticket was for third class, the conductor tried to collect a surcharge. When I explained the circumstances of my trip, he ultimately rescinded his request. Just before crossing the border my passport was returned to me, and so ended the last of my illegal journeys.

Occasionally on summer weekends I went to Blankenberge. This was a popular coastal resort on the North Sea, about two and half hours by train, from Brussels. It had an extremely wide and long beach. Along the beach there was a boardwalk with many restaurants, sidewalk cafes, places of entertainment with dance music, and a casino. I always returned to this same resort, as the majority of my single friends congregated there during the summer.

I received the papers from my sponsor, and submitted them to the U.S. Consulate in Antwerp. The constant inquiries for additional information were endless, and it was impossible to see the Vice Consul, as he was only accessible to U.S. citizens. My sponsor came to Belgium again, and I asked him to intervene on my behalf at the consulate. He was very willing to do so, but felt it would look rather awkward to present his U.S. passport, and to be unable to converse in English. This man, who by now had lived in New York for about eight years, being pretty successful in the diamond business, was unable to speak any English, as his business language was strictly Yiddish. I assured him that I would be doing all the talking, and I did the best I could with my limited English. I was told that my case was under review, and that I would hear from them shortly.

In the summer of 1948, I applied for a Swiss visa, to see my brother in Geneva. It was granted to me, and I spent a short vacation with my brother. He had finished his schooling, and was now working in an office. By the time, not only did my brother receive the affidavit from the friend in Los Angeles, but he was also the recipient of a collective affidavit given for many young Jewish war survivors by the owner of the Bulova Watch Company, in New York. Based on the latter affidavit, he received his visa in the Fall of 1948.

Returning to Brussels, I began to take English lessons. I had a girl friend who was fluent in English, and gave me frequent opportunities to practice the language. Again, I had complications with the U.S. Consulate, in Antwerp. Originally, I had registered that I would receive papers from cousins. As my papers were from friends, the Consulate insisted that I should comply with my original registration and submit papers issued by my cousins. After a long correspondence, I finally received the necessary papers from my relatives. After complying with several additional requests from the Consulate, my visa was authorized in November of 1948. In December, my brother stopped in Brussels for a couple of days, on his way to the States.

Due to the long struggle extending over a number of years to obtain my visa, my

enthusiasm had begun to wane, and by now I had a feeling of apprehension in leaving Brussels and settling in a new country. Even though I had the assurance of the visa, I still procrastinated, and only booked passage for New York on the S.S. America, a relatively new ship, leaving at the end of January, just before my visa would expire.

My ship left from a French port. I was pleasantly surprised to see how easy it was to get a French transit visa, and how liberal the border controls were on the trip from Brussels to Paris. My crossing was comparatively smooth, and I was hardly affected by seasickness. I did not see some of my fellow passengers from the day we boarded, until we landed in New York, as they spent the entire trip confined to their cabins with seasickness. Until my voyage on this ship, which flew the U.S. flag, and belonged to the United States Lines, I had never seen such an abundance of food. Even the cleaning crew had late night snacks of fried chicken, something unknown in Europe. The whole atmosphere on board ship was very informal, according to European standards.

On the morning of the arrival at my destination, New York City, I got up especially early. Under no circumstance would I miss the sight of the Statue of Liberty. It was hard for me to believe that finally, at the age of twenty-five, after all my wandering through Europe, I was entering the United States, legally. And especially, that without further requests, I would be allowed to work, and after five years I would shed my stateless papers and become a United States citizen.